DOE seeks public input on GNEP

Idaho Falls, Idaho - The U.S. Department of Energy's Idaho National Laboratory announced March 9 that the 11th of 12 public scoping meetings on the Programmatic Environmental Impact Statement (PEIS) for the President's Global Nuclear Energy Partnership (GNEP) will be held on from 6 to 9:30 p.m. on Thursday, March 15, 2007 at the Red Lion Hotel, 475 River Parkway, in Idaho Falls. DOE is holding meetings around the nation in February and March to evaluate potential GNEP sites.

"We look forward to gaining a broader understanding of the environmental conditions under which we will be operating, so we look forward to getting the local perspective at each site we're evaluating to potentially build a GNEP site," DOE Assistant Secretary for Nuclear Energy Dennis Spurgeon said. "Our need for nuclear power - a safe, emissions-free and affordable source of energy - is great and GNEP puts us on a path to encourage expansion of domestic and international nuclear energy production while reducing nuclear proliferation risks."

DOE is considering its Idaho National Laboratory as a potential site for one or more of the following: an advanced fuel cycle research facility which would perform research and development into spent nuclear fuel recycling processes and other advanced nuclear fuel cycles; a nuclear fuel recycling center which would separate spent nuclear fuel into reusable and waste components and then manufacture new nuclear fast reactor fuel using the reusable components; and an advanced recycling reactor which would destroy long-lived radioactive elements in the new fuel while generating electricity.

Photo: GNEP process

GNEP is an evolving U.S. global nuclear strategy aimed at reducing global dependence on fossil fuels; providing reliable, abundant energy necessary for economic growth, prosperity and health; utilizing international expertise to advance technologies and safeguards; and reducing the risk of nuclear proliferation.

And DOE is considering the nearby town of Atomic City, Idaho, as a potential site for a nuclear fuel recycling center and/or an advanced recycling reactor.

The GNEP PEIS will analyze the potential environmental impacts for both programmatic and project-specific proposed actions, as well as reasonable alternatives, and will also evaluate, at a programmatic level, the potential environmental impacts associated with the international initiatives.

A Notice of Intent (NOI) to prepare a PEIS for GNEP was posted in the Federal Register on Jan. 4, 2007, and outlines the programmatic and project-specific proposals of GNEP. The public comment period began on that date and continues for 90 days, through April 4, 2007. All comments received during the public scoping period will be considered in preparing the GNEP PEIS.

These Idaho sites are two of the 13 sites in eight states DOE is considering for the construction of the three different facilities.

After the public comment period, DOE contemplates that the PEIS will consider these 13 sites as possible locations for one or more of the proposed GNEP facilities. Eleven of these sites were selected based on responses received regarding the Funding Opportunity Announcement (http://www.energy.gov/news/4492.htm), as well as two additional DOE sites that the Department has preliminarily identified as a possible location for a DOE-directed advanced fuel cycle research facility.

GNEP will recycle spent nuclear fuel and destroy its long-lived radioactive components. To accomplish this, DOE proposes to design, build and operate three facilities: an advanced fuel cycle research facility, a nuclear fuel recycling center; and an advanced recycling reactor which would destroy long-lived radioactive elements in the new fuel while generating electricity.

An advanced nuclear fuel recycling center contains facilities where usable uranium and transuranics are separated from spent light-water reactor fuel for use in producing new fuel that can be reused in a power reactor. An advanced recycling reactor is a fast reactor that would demonstrate the ability to reuse and consume materials recovered from spent nuclear fuel, including long-lived elements that would otherwise have to be disposed of in a geologic repository. Both facilities could be located at the same site.

The development and deployment of advanced nuclear fuel recycling facilities is a major element of GNEP, part of President Bush's Advanced Energy Initiative. In general, these technologies focus on separating commercial light-water reactor spent nuclear fuel (SNF) into its usable and waste components, fabricating and recycling fast reactor fuel containing transuranic elements from the usable components of SNF, and converting those transuranics into shorter-lived radioisotopes while producing electricity in an advanced recycling reactor.

GNEP also includes two international initiatives: 1) Ensure reliable fuel services, in which the U.S. would cooperate with countries that have advanced nuclear programs to supply nuclear fuel services to other countries that refrain from pursuing enrichment or recycling facilities to make their own nuclear fuel; and, 2) Development of proliferation-resistant nuclear power reactors suitable for use in developing economies.

As part of President Bush's Advanced Energy Initiative, GNEP encourages expansion of domestic and international nuclear energy production

while minimizing proliferation risks, and reductions in the volume, thermal output, and radiotoxicity of spent nuclear fuel before disposal in a geologic repository.

For a list of times and locations for all GNEP public scoping meetings, visit: http://www.gnep.gov/PEIS/gnepPEIS.html#gnepScopingMeetings.

For more information on GNEP, visit: http://www.gnep.gov/.

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